an appeal to the kidnappers through Arab TV channel for release of the hostages who are innocent civilians and not combatants. The Government also contacted the Governments of Egypt and Kenya whose nationals are among the hostages for inputs to work for the release of the hostages. Our Mission in Kuwait has been in touch with the transport company KGL from the very beginning of the abduction and received an assurance from the company to take all possible steps to ensure release and safe return of the kidnapped drivers. The situation is constantly being monitored by the Crisis Management Group which meets regularly and frequently to review strategies to secure safe and early release of hostages. Shri E. Ahammed, MoS has issued appeals to the kidnappers through Arabic TV network highlighting historical relations between India and Iraq and India's well-known and principled position and concern for the welfare and well-being of Iraqi people and their country and requesting for immediate release of the hostages. He also made an appeal to the captors in Arabic language for release of the hostages on humanitarian grounds. Religious leaders in Iraq and other Gulf countries were contacted to intercede for the release of the hostages. Ambassador of India in Muscat, Shri Talmiz Ahmad alongwith an Arabic interpreter has been deputed to Iraq to monitor and report on the developments and to assist in the work of the Indian Mission for early and safe release of the hostages. Cabinet Secretary has been regularly holding inter-Ministerial/ Departmental meetings to review the situation and the ongoing efforts to secure the release of the hostages. External Affairs Minister has been following developments closely and giving directions whenever necessary The Prime Minister and the CCPA have also held meetings to review developments. Efforts are continuing to get their release. The deadline set by the kidnappers has been extended several times and the talks between the transport company KGL and the kidnappers through mediators are continuing

Safety of Indians in Iraq

1683. SHRI UDAY PRATAP SINGH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the steps taken by the Government for the safety of Indian citizens in Iraq after some citizens of Indian origin were taken hostages in Iraq;

(b) whether Government have taken stringent measures for the safety of Indian citizens in other Gulf countries in addition to Iraq; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) Government have issued a travel advisory asking Indian citizens to defer their visits to Iraq for the time being and have placed restrictions on travel of Indians to Iraq. The Government have reiterated its instructions to the Missions in the Gulf to extend all possible assistance to the Indian nationals in Iraq desiring to return to India. The Indian Mission in Baghdad has been instructed to visit work sites of Indian citizens to the extent possible to enquire after their safety and well-being and to take appropriate steps to ensure this.

(b) and (c) Indian Missions in the Gulf countries and Government are monitoring the developments that may have a bearing on the safety of the Indian citizens in other Gulf countries. A telephone based helpline has been made operational in Embassy of India, Saudi Arabia to address various concerns, including questions of safety, if any, of Indian citizens there. Monthly "open house" are held in the Missions in the Gulf countries in order to understand first hand and to address the concerns, including safety aspects, of the Indian community.

Unhelpful attitude of Indian Embassy in France

1684. SHRI VIJAY J DARDA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether Government are aware on 16th May, 2004 an Indian and his wife, while landing at Paris Airport, lost their return ticket, foreign exchange, credit card, and on his persistent request to Indian Embassy, no help whatsoever from Indian Embassy was given to this stranded Indian couple;

(b) if so, the reason for this unhelpful attitude adopted by the Indian Embassy; and

(c) what are the MEA guidelines to Indian Embassies in such cases?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) and (b) The Government are aware of the incident. An enquiry in the matter has revealed that an official from